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Abstract

The Jewish legends which are a major part of Jewish life and literature are the focus of this study guide for teachers. Excerpts from a lecture on Jewish legends are followed by suggestions for classroom activities, discussion topics related to the study of Jewish legends, and a bibliography for both teachers and students on Jewish legend and myth. Also included is a 4-week model instructional unit, for the 12th grade, which contains teacher and pupil objectives, suggested activities, evaluation techniques, a bibliography, and a list of instructional aids. (MF)

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THE IMAGE OF THE JEW IN LITERATURE

A series of films and publications
produced jointly by the
Catholic Archdiocese of New York
and the Anti-Defamation League
of B'nai B'rith.

Teachers' Study Guide: Jewish Legends

Film lecture by Elie Wiesel

Study Guide by Joseph Mersand, Ph.D.

TE 001 586

The Image of the Jew in Literature **and** ***Jews and Their Religion*** **are two unique series of inservice training programs for teachers in Catholic parochial schools and for Confraternity of Christian Doctrine courses. Now available either on film or videotape, they were produced as a jointly-sponsored project of the Archdiocese of New York and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. These programs, which in some instances can also be profitably used in the actual classroom situation, have been supplemented by resource units and instructional guides that attempt to provide teachers with the background and tools necessary for the teaching of varied material relating to the Jews. The programs are a response to the direction taken in Vatican II Council and the initiative of the American Hierarchy. As such, they bring some of America's leading Jewish scholars to the Catholic teacher in particular, as the search is continued for the best course that Judeo-Christian relations should take in our time.**

Table of Contents

1. *Jewish Legends* by Elie Wiesel 5

2. *Teachers' Study Guide* by Dr. Joseph Mersand 11

    Preface 12

    Introductory Remarks 13

    Aims of This Study Guide 17

    Classroom Activities and Discussion Topics 18

    Bibliography for Teachers and Students 21

3. *Model Instructional Unit* by Milton Silver 25

JEWISH LEGENDS
by ELIE WIESEL

(The following passages — stories, tales, legends — are excerpted from the original script delivered by Mr. Wiesel, noted novelist, journalist and story-teller, on closed-circuit television.* It is felt that in its present form the material will serve the teacher better for use in the classroom.)

Reb Mendel of Kotsk used to say: "Often when I walk in the forest, I see a castle. The castle is burning, and I see a man at a window; and this man at the window is shouting, 'People, there is fire in the castle! People, the castle is burning.'" Then Reb Mendel interpreted his vision. "Yes," he said, "the castle is on fire, the forest is on fire, the Holy Word is on fire. But there is an owner of the castle, there is someone there. Someone we can't see, but someone we must hear."

Is there an owner in the castle? To my (Wiesel's) generation this question was put very cruelly, very often. The child that I was, drunk with fervor and drunk with prayer, later on grew to doubt whether there was anything there but fire. Not Holy Fire, but simply fire. Not the fire of the Burning Bush, but the fire of the holocaust.

It doesn't matter, really. For as one of my Masters told me: "You know, it's not actually important whether God listens to your prayer. The important thing is that you cry out to Him. He doesn't need your prayers, *you* need them."

* * *

Through Jewish legend everything is connected. Isaac has been sacrificed and saved more than once, and the word spoken and heard three thousand years ago still affects us today. The Temple is still in flame, and it is part of our daily reality. It was not in vain that as a child, every night except Friday night, I got up at midnight and put ashes

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on my forehead, crying with my masters and my friends at the destruction of the Temple. It was the soul's fire, and the legend was ours; so the Temple became ours. The Temple is in flame, and the promise made by God to Abraham still weighs on our world.

* * *

It is written in the Talmud,[1] "It is enough for the just man to order something, and God must obey."

One of the Hasidic[2] Rabbis used to say, "Oh, God, I do not want You to obey my will, but at least make me obey Your will." But not all the Hasidic Rabbis were so humble or so astute. Some tried to impose their will upon His. Why didn't God say to them: "Listen, the Torah (Scriptures) was meant for you, not for Me?" Because, to the Hasid, this is not true. The Torah was intended for both man and God, and therefore God Himself must submit.

* * *

The Talmud tells us of a certain Ben Uziel, a convert to Judaism, who wrote one of the most beautiful and imaginative translations of the Biblical Scriptures. He is said to have studied the Torah with such fervor and in such ecstasy that, whenever he touched his books, he was surrounded by fire, the fire of Sinai. Today we do not study the Torah as often as he did; I even think we are studying it with less fervor. Yet it is sufficient for us to touch almost anything to be burned by fire — the fire of the holocaust. No matter what we do, no matter what the subject is, no matter in what direction we go, somehow we end up by studying the Nazi holocaust and telling its tales. As though all questions and all answers were embodied there — and, for my generation at least, they are.

* * *

In one of the many concentration camps, a Jew spoke to God, saying, "Perhaps I am guilty, perhaps we all are, and all deserve punishment. But what are *You* guilty of in meting out to us this terrible punishment?"

* * *

As a Hasid myself, the knowledge that the Hasidim were among the first victims in the holocaust of European Jewry is particularly painful to me. But I know, too, that their tales remain. In fact, strange as it may sound, those Hasidim who perished in the fires of the holocaust even managed to create some new tales. Legends about the Zadikim (just and pious men) who, in April 1943, when the Warsaw Ghetto was

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[1] The body of Jewish civil and canonical law.

[2] A group founded in Poland in the 18th century by the Baal Shem-Tov, and characterized by its emphasis on mysticism, prayer, religious zeal and joy.

already in the last stages of its existence, had only one thing on their minds — how to help other Jews, how to give. They were starving, these Zadikim, they had nothing to eat themselves; yet they went around from man to man begging bread for someone else.

* * *

I know some Christians who wonder why Jews talk so much about the holocaust. It is a seemingly reasonable question, but a wrong one. *I* think that we don't talk enough. And why? Simply because we don't know how. For the real tale of the holocaust transcends words, transcends anguish, defies imagination. There is a certain very natural timidity in us, a fear that by talking overly of the holocaust we may betray its true meaning. So we keep relatively quiet and only the surface emerges.

There is another reason why I think the question is a wrong one. Two thousand years ago a Jew died in Jerusalem, and out of his death a religion was born. Two thousand years ago *one* Jew died, and millions, hundreds of millions of people all over the world, are still talking about his death. So why shouldn't we of today try to talk and try to remember, in words or in art, the death of six million Jews?

* * *

Somewhere in the Warsaw Ghetto ten Jewish hostages were about to be executed, and one of them, nicknamed Moshe the Water Carrier, began laughing with all his might. It was the holy day of Purim (also called The Feast of Lots), and on Purim, which is a joyous holiday, the Jews are supposed to laugh and to drink in celebration of the miracle which befell the Jewish community of Shushan over two thousand years ago. Much like Hitler, the evil Haman had planned to exterminate all the Jews, but they were saved by God and by Mordecai and Esther. So to drink and be joyous on Purim is as important as it is to fast on the Day of Atonement.

. . . But the Germans were laughing as well, and they said to Moshe, "Now you will pay for what you once did to Haman and his children."

Standing on the gallows, Moshe the Water Carrier continued to laugh, and he laughed with all his might. He said to the Germans, "I pity you." Everybody thought he had gone mad. Perhaps he had. Perhaps his madness was a necessary madness, a human madness. And he laughed again and said, "I pity you, because my laughter is not like yours. You see, today I am Moshe the Water Carrier, but tomorrow I shall be Moshe the Martyr."

Another tale from yet another camp. A pious Jew assembled a group of Jews to judge God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. "Somewhere in this world," said this Jew, "there is a city which contains all other cities. And in this city there is a street which contains all other streets,

and a house which contains all other houses, and a room which contains all other rooms; and in this room there is a man, in whom all men are reflected. And there, in the solitude of this room, the man is laughing."

But is he really laughing, and who is he? Often I used to wonder with anxiety whether he was a man at all; whether he might not be the owner of the castle (*see* tale #1). For, as the Talmud says, "God may laugh with man, but he never laughs at man; and when they laugh together, both man and God attain a kind of triumph, a state of Grace which announces the coming of the Messiah."

* * *

One day the evil spirit came to God and said, "Master of the Universe, what is the difference between this group of people who are pure, and these who are impure?" And God answered, "They, the pure ones, protested. The others did not protest." "So," said the evil spirit, "had they protested, would You have listened to them?" And God said, "No." "Did they know that?" asked the evil spirit. And God said, "No, they didn't know it; therefore, they should have protested. Protested against Me, against Man, against everything wrong. Because protest in itself contains a spark of truth, a spark of holiness, a spark of God."

Therefore, little does it matter whether our protest is heard or not. Protest we must, because by the mere fact of protesting we show that we care, that we listen, that we feel.

* * *

It is said that when Israel ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov, prophetically foresaw misfortune approaching his people, he went to a certain place in the forest and he lit a fire in a certain way and he said a certain prayer. Whereupon God took away the threatened misfortune.

Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Maggid of Mezhirich, saw misfortune coming near his people, he went to a certain place in the forest and he lit a fire in a certain way, and he said to God, "Master of the Universe, I don't know the prayer, but I know the place in the forest and I know how to light the fire. That must be enough." And it was enough.

Some time afterwards, when Moshe Leib of Sassov, another Hasidic master, saw that things were bad and catastrophe was nearing, he, too, went to the forest and said, "Lord and Master of the Universe and of all men, I don't know the prayer, I don't know how to light the fire, but I do know the place in the forest and that must be enough." And again it was enough.

Still later yet, when his disciple, Reb Israel of Rizhyn, saw that the times were bad and the enemies of Israel were getting stronger, he did not move. He remained seated at his table, and he took his head into his hands, and he closed his eyes and he spoke to God, "Heavenly

Father, Master of all people and Father of Thy children, I don't know the prayer, I don't know how to light the fire, I don't know the place in the forest, I don't even know the forest. All I know is how to tell this tale, and that must be enough."

. . . And, as you all know, sometimes when God likes tales, it is enough.

* * *

Once upon a time, there was a rabbi called Reb Pinhas of Koretz, who was one of the great masters in the Hasidic movement. Reb Pinhas saw beauty and joy in all things and in all people, which is one of the basic tenets of Hasidisim. One day he received a visit from one of his disciples. "Rebbe," the disciple said, "I have come to you because I am greatly troubled, because I have too many doubts. The world is too full of anguish, too full of sadness. Jews are not what they should be, Christians are not what they should be, man is not what he ought to be, and I — I am not what I think I am. Something is wrong. I have questions, I have doubts. Help me, what should I do?" Pinhas of Koretz then said to him, "Go and study." But the disciple wasn't satisfied with his answer. "Rebbe," he complained, "the trouble is I cannot study. My doubts are so powerful, so all-pervasive, I simply cannot go on. I try to study the Talmud, but for weeks, for months, I'm always on the same page. I tell you, Rebbe, I simply cannot go on; there are just too many questions."

Now, when a Hasid doesn't have an answer, he has a tale. So Pinhas of Koretz replied, "All right, then, I shall tell you a tale, a tale about myself. You know, when I was your age, I had the same problem. I, too, had terrible doubts. Doubts about the Master of the Universe, doubts about His Creation, doubts about the relationship or lack of relationship between the two. And I, too, tried studying the Talmud, the Bible and the Commentaries; I, too, felt that I could not go on. No matter how often I tried, I too seemed always to be on the same page — and this situation went on for weeks and for months. During this time I literally tried everything. I studied Musar,[3] I tried silence, I tried fasting, I tried renouncing all worldly pleasures and all heavenly pleasures. Nothing seemed to work. The doubts remained doubts, and the questions, questions.

"Then one day I heard that the Baal Shem Tov had come to town, and my curiosity led me to the small synagogue where he was conducting services. The synagogue was very crowded, so people did not notice me. I saw that when the Baal Shem Tov finished the *Amidah* (the silent prayer), he turned around and he looked at me. Of course I knew that he was not actually looking at me, and that everybody there must also be thinking he was looking at them. At the same time, nonetheless,

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[3] Traditional ethical literature.

I felt that he *did* see me and that our eyes met. And, though I do not know what really happened, I was able to return to my apartment, open the Talmud and begin studying again. You see," Pinhas of Koretz said to his disciple, "though the questions remained questions, and the doubts remained doubts, I could somehow continue."

* * *

I belong to a generation and to a people that like questions just as they like tales. The first letter in the Torah, in the Jewish Bible, is a Bet, *i.e.*, a B and not an A. Why? Simply to offer the beginner a question. Certain books tell us that God created man because God himself likes questions, as he likes tales. I think we Jews are the question mark of mankind, and that in creating us God chose thus to question mankind. Which is the reason, perhaps, why we seem to be the center of so many tales, often not our own. Legend tells us that Adam, the first man, was at one and the same time both an atheist and a pious man. So even he is presented to us as a question mark. But questions aren't dangerous, answers are. . . .

* * *

Once upon a time, there was a famous Hasidic rabbi, called Reb Zischa of Hanopoli. On this particular day, he was traveling by train. Sitting next to Reb Zischa, who was poor and looked it, was a Jew who was rich and looked it even more. The two men did not know each other, so the rich Jew permitted himself to be both arrogant and disrespectful. However, when Reb Zischa arrived at his destination and was greeted there by many of his enthusiastic followers, the rich Jew realized at once who his traveling companion was. So, guilty and repentant, he came to Reb Zischa and pleaded for forgiveness, explaining with tears in his eyes that he hadn't known that the poor traveler was in fact the famous Reb Zischa.

Reb Zischa listened, and he listened with sympathy. Then he answered, "I would gladly forgive you, but how can I? You did not insult Reb Zischa, you insulted a poor man. Therefore, go and ask forgiveness from all the poor people who roam the world."

In other words, I can forgive anything and everything that has been done to me, but I cannot speak for others who have suffered. What I can and must do is to try and create more understanding between us. Then, without erasing the past — which is impossible — we can come to see and understand and use it as a link to both the present and future. Perhaps my tales can be this link.

* * *

Teachers' Study Guide

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Preface

One of the purposes of this literature series is to sensitize the individual teacher to the general subject by first acquainting him with the facts. Then, by the teacher's own reflections on what he has seen and heard — particularly with respect to causes and the often deleterious outcomes — we may reasonably expect that his horizons will be widened. So that when he finally has occasion to discuss these matters in class, he should be able to teach the material from a truer perspective and against a richer historical background.

The teachers' guide which follows consists of five parts:

1. Introductory remarks
2. Aims of this study guide
3. Classroom activities and discussion topics
4. Bibliography for teachers and students
5. Model instructional unit

It should be clearly understood that this guide is designed *for the teacher,* and is meant to be suggestive, not prescriptive. Each teacher or supervisor viewing the filmed or televised program will very likely think of other possibilities as a result of his or her personal interests and experiences. At the same time, many of you will undoubtedly see ways in which the materials presented in this guide can be introduced into your classrooms more appropriately and effectively. A guide at best is only a useful tool whose basic rationale is to aid the teacher and stimulate his creativity. The rest and most crucial part of the job is in the hands of each one of you.

In this unit, the teaching level will be determined by (or will determine) the appropriate grade level. For example, one might approach this subject as one of several facets of folklore, myth and legend studied in 10th year English classes; preferably, it can be dealt with in a more sophisticated manner as part of a world literature program in the 12th year. Equally effective would be to incorporate much of this material with segments of others in the series, "The Image of the Jew in Literature", in a special 12th year elective interdisciplinary seminar (involving such subject areas as literature, sociology, philosophy, religion, history, humanities). The essential aim would be to move toward the over-all goal of the series — evolving an understanding of what is imaged (or revealed) concerning the Jew, his environment, his attitudes, his values, his beliefs, his aspirations and his achievements.

Introductory Remarks

> Jewish legend is not mythological. Be he entity or not, Jupiter is not a living person. Be he drunk or sober, Bacchus is not a human being either. But King David is, Rabbi Akiba is, Moses and Samuel are. Our martyrs and heroes, the dreamers of time ever to come, the prophets of the past and the future — to us, they are alive, and whenever we study them we feel the link that still connects us to their teaching. We even hear their voices. Legends to us are nontemporal; they unfold before our very eyes. Behind every legend one finds, one senses, another legend which preceded it by a thousand or two thousand years. One might even say that, throughout history, it is the same legend that is being told over and over again. What changes is the setting. What changes is the lighting. What changes is perhaps the public. What changes is the teller, but *not* the tale.
>
> Elie Wiesel

Legends have been a major part of the heritage of the Jews almost from the beginnings of their recorded history. The term *legend* originally applied to narratives of the Middle Ages (such as the lives of the saints), which had *to be read* as a religious duty. However, what the word suggests need not be limited to its ecclesiastical usage. In a broader sense, legend may be taken to imply whatever will come *to be read* by successive ages as an event or record of the past. Great events and great books have a posthumous story of their own. Each following period pours its inner life into the pliant texts of the old. In turn, the familiar documents reward and surprise new inquirers, and offer new answers.

According to Louis Ginzberg, "The books of the Bible, in particular, have had an afterlife unique in the annals of history. Devout centuries wove endless fantasies around the characters and occurrences depicted in the Holy Writ. Both folk imagination and scholar's wit coaxed and forced from its pages a multitude of tales and a host of fancies unforeseen and unsuspected by the writers of the Bible. This creative partnership of posterity, freshly and freely embellishing and embroidering the ancient design, has borne a rich crop of legends in which the biblical text has become disengaged from its first intention, revised and enriched by the faith and fantasy of innumerable readers throughout the ages.

"The Bible has been the most widely read book of civilization, and its stories, even before they were written down, had moved the minds and hearts of men for centuries. So the legends of the Bible enshrine meditations inspired by the contents or words of Scripture over the course

of thousands of years. Behind these legends is the glory of a book as transformed by a hundred generations of men. Behind them is also the glory of generations whose daily thoughts and deeds were shaped and their very lives transformed by the book of books."[1]

Much of this material is contained in the so-called *Haggadah* (narration). About thirty percent of the Talmud is taken up with *Haggadah,* which includes everything in Talmudic literature that is not of a legal nature — such as descriptions of historical events and legends, principles of faith and belief, proverbs and aphorisms that illustrate moral duties and a vision of the ideal world of the future. The rest of the Talmud, the *Halakhah,* contains discussions leading to rules of conduct.

The aim and purpose of Haggadic literature is to inspire and edify, and to move people to the kind of righteous behavior which the *Halakhah* requires. Haggadic literature penetrates deeply into the spirit of the Bible by means of its broad interpretations of the text, and the Jewish people have received comfort and strength from it for many generations.

Haggadic literature is rich in literary forms: parable and allegory; personification and poetic phrase; lyric song, lament and prayer; biting satire and fiery polemic; idyllic story and dramatic colloquy; metaphor and word play — all indiscriminately mixed. There is, however, only one subject: to teach the way of the Lord. As such, it is concerned with the secret of God's providence and rule over creation and man; the nature of idolatry; the origin, nature, and purpose of man; his relationship to God and the universe; the problem of the righteous and the wicked; reward and punishment; the place of Israel among the nation and its mission; the world to come, and the messianic era. The moral teaching of *Haggadah* reflects not only the points of view and the spiritual outlook of the scholars who strove to improve the moral state of mankind, but also the political, social, and ethical conditions of the periods in which they lived.

The *Midrash,* which in its own turn developed out of the *Haggadah,* grew over a period of a thousand years in various countries of different religions and cultures, and shows traces of the influence of different periods and localities (e.g., Platonic, Stoic and Pythagorean ideas; popular superstitions and beliefs from Babylonia). The work of editing and arranging the *Midrash* came to an end about the end of the 10th century. (An important modern work was completed by Louis Ginzberg in his *Legends of the Jews* [1909-28], which arranges the material in accordance with the personalities and events described in Scriptures. Ginzberg required four volumes for his collection of legends, and another

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[1] Louis Ginzberg. *Legends of the Bible.* From the Introduction by Shalom Spiegel (pp. XI-XII). Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956.

three for an index and a listing of source material culled from forty different languages.)

Relevant to this whole discussion on legends is the Hasidic movement. Hasidism, which is a religious and social movement founded by the Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name) in Eastern Europe (*see* footnote 2, p. 6.), was the outgrowth of the depressed state of East European Jewry in the 18th century. Thus, one of the most important aspects of Hasidic thought was a kind of religious ecstasy--or, perhaps, joy is a better word. The Hasidim believed that man could approach God not only or necessarily through study, penitence and formal prayer, but also through a joyous response to all of creation expressed through song, dance and story-telling.

The Baal Shem Tov revealed his teaching partly in the form of tales and parables. In addition, many legends testifying to his holy powers gained increasing currency. Like many great religious leaders, the Baal Shem Tov preferred to teach by word of mouth; similarly, a number of successive leaders of the movement were to follow this pattern.

The Hasidim would often go to a Reb or Rebbe (a Master; also called a *Zaddik,* a saintly or just man) for the Sabbath to listen to his teaching and to seek his advice. At the Sabbath meal, the Rebbes often wove their teachings into an extended metaphor, parable or illustrative tale. An important part of the Hasidic way of life therefore became story-telling.

In the material which precedes this study guide, Mr. Wiesel tells a number of tales or legends, all of them memorable. Each has a point, a lesson to teach. In the case of Reb Zichik of Hanopoli, it is a lesson in humility vs. pride. Again, in the case of Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz, the legend about him helps explain Mr. Wiesel's own need to bring greater understanding between peoples, even though he personally has had more reason than most to despair.

Mr. Wiesel also makes some interesting generalizations about Jewish legends which should stimulate serious reflection and discussion. For example, he states that "Jewish legend, even before the holocaust, contained something of it; for it began with fire." Later on, he points out that "Jewish legend has always relevancy to the present. Through it, everything is connected." These, as well as other remarks, add a new dimension to the study of Jewish legend. In this general connection, Fraser's *Golden Bough* comes to mind, since this classic study has shown the evolution and influence of legends, and the role they have played in the history of western civilization.

For the Hasidic Jews, about whom Mr. Wiesel relates several stories, legends offered them a glimmer of hope in time of great suffering and despair. Such, for example, is the touching legend about the prayer in the woods offered by the Baal Shem Tov. Similarly, the Nazi holocaust, which Elie Wiesel personally experienced and survived, is present also in a number of tales. In one of them, he says, "I think we don't talk

enough (about the holocaust). Simply, we don't know how. The real tale of the holocaust transcends words, transcends anguish, defies imagination." Just as the Christian world has not stopped talking about a single Jew in Jerusalem who died two thousand years ago, so, feels Mr. Wiesel, we today must continue telling the tale of the killing of six million Jews. Perhaps in this way a link can be established between them and us, and — even more important — between us and all of mankind.

It might be appropriate to conclude these introductory remarks by another brief excerpt from Mr. Wiesel's original text. In it, he is recounting what happened when, as a grown man, he saw again his old Rebbe.

> Twenty years have elapsed since he last saw me. We were then still in Hungary. My mother had brought me to him to obtain his blessing. Now we were alone in a room, in a suburb near Tel Aviv. And for some reason I felt more uncomfortable than then.
>
> He sat in his armchair and studied me. He had not changed much. His face remained friendly and pained. His smile contained all the wisdom in the world.
>
> "Tell me what you are doing," the Rebbe said in a soft voice. I told him I was writing. "Is that all?" he asked in disbelief. I said, "Yes, that's all." His expression was so reproachful that I had to elaborate and explain that some writings could sometimes, in moments of grace, attain the quality of deeds. But he did not seem to understand.
>
> "What are you writing?" the Rebbe asked. "Stories," I said. He wanted to know what kind of stories: "True stories? About people you knew?" "Yes, about people I *might* have known." "About things that happened?" "Yes, about things that happened or *could have* happened." "But they did not?" "No, not all of them did. In fact, some were invented from almost the beginning to the end."
>
> The Rebbe leaned forward as if to measure me up and said with more sorrow than anger: "That means you are writing lies!" I did not answer immediately. The scolded child within me had nothing to say in defense. Yet I had to justify myself: *"Things are not that simple, Rebbe. Some events do take place but are not true; others are — although they never occurred."*
>
> That was all I could say. Was it enough? I did not know. The Rebbe let it stand. He stared at me for a long moment until his face lit up again. He asked me to come closer; I obeyed. "Come," he said, "You should not go away empty-handed. Come and I shall give you my blessing."

Aims of This Study Guide

1. To recount a number of typical Hasidic and Talmudic legends.
2. To demonstrate the significance of these legends in their own time, and their relevancy to our day.
3. To examine the image of the Jew as revealed in these legends.
4. To show how new legends were created in the time of the Nazi holocaust, and how they continue to be created to this day.
5. To explain why these and other legends have kept alive, and the function that they serve.
6. To give some insight into the tenets of Hasidic Jews, about whom many of these legends are told.
7. To provoke interest in legends in general and Jewish legends in particular.
8. To indicate both the uniqueness and the universality of Jewish legends.
9. To point out the functions that legends and tales play in the lives of people and cultures.

Classroom Activities and Discussion Topics

* — indicates topics and activities suitable for the average high school student which will tend, generally, to be effective as classroom projects

** — indicates suggestions for the superior high school student which will probably be more appropriate for honors classes and/or individual students ready for more advanced projects

** 1. *A study of the legends of the Jews.* A student committee can consult Louis Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews,* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society. Volumes I-IV contain the legends; Volumes V-VI, the notes; Volume VII, the Index. Shalom Spiegel's introduction to the seven-volume edition is particularly useful, and deserves special attention. There is also a one-volume version in paperback called *Legends of the Bible* (1956).

** 2. *Critical estimates of Elie Wiesel's writings.* Most of his work has had extensive reviews, all of which are listed in *Book Review Digest.* An interesting project might be to have a student compare several reviews of the same work, and then give his own view. (Two writers in the magazine *The Commonweal* have also written critiques of all of Wiesel's books: M. Friedman, "The Modern Job," *Commonweal,* 85 [October 14, 1966], pp. 48-52; I. Halperin, "Postscript to Death," *Commonweal,* 79 [March 13, 1964], pp. 713-15.)

** 3. *A study of the writings of Hasidism.* For an excellent introduction to this subject, *see* Martin Buber's works listed in the bibliography. There are also excellent articles in *The Jewish Encyclopedia,* published originally by Funk & Wagnalls in 1904 and recently reprinted by the KTAV Publishing Company, New York City, as well as in the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* published in the 1940's.

** 4. *A study of the legends of the Golem and the Dybbuk.* One of the legends recounted by Elie Wiesel revolves around the Golem (a figure of clay that took on life), made by the Maharal of Prague to protect the Jews. A play called *The Golem* was written by the Yiddish playwright, H. Leivick, and published in 1921. An English translation by J. C. Augenlicht appeared in the magazine *Poet Lore* (1928), and can be found in many large libraries. Similarly, the story of the Dybbuk, which appears in Cabalistic literature and concerns the soul of a sinner who, after

death, transmigrates into the body of a living person, can be used in connection with this study. There is, first of all, the play by S. Ansky, entitled *The Dybbuk* and available in paperback. There is also the free version of this story in Paddy Chayevsky's well-known play, *The Tenth Man*.

* 5. *A comparative study of Jewish and non-Jewish legends.* For students who have read legends of other peoples or ethnic groups, it might prove valuable to compare and contrast some of the legends related by Mr. Wiesel with, for example, legends of Christian saints during the early Christian era or the Middle Ages, as well as with any other legends they may be familiar with.

* 6. *Preparation of a glossary for class use.* There are several terms which Elie Wiesel uses in his text and stories that may need defining: e.g., *Hasidism, Talmud, Haggadah, Halachah, Midrash, Torah, Holocaust, Reb* or *Rebbe*, etc. The teacher might himself compile such a list, or else ask for volunteers to look them up in an unabridged dictionary or encyclopedia and have them reproduced for other members in the class, either on the blackboard or in mimeograph form.

* 7. *Report on a recent best-seller about Hasidism in the U.S.A.* The best-selling novel, *The Chosen,* by Chaim Potok (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967) can be read as a class project or as the departure-point for a supplementary book report. This novel is also available as a paperback published by Fawcett.

* 8. *Student construction of enrichment materials.* Many individual and group projects can enliven this study unit. For example: terminology, difficult vocabulary, names, etc., can be used in the creation of crossword puzzles (which can be duplicated and distributed); appropriate maps and illustrations can be designed by some students. In addition, murals and dioramas should be constructed whenever applicable.

* 9. *Related oral English activities.* Throughout the unit, possibilities exist for dramatizations, readings and student panel discussions (*see* Part IV of the Model Instructional Unit).

*10. *A film based on a tale of a Hasidic rabbi.* The film is called "If Not Higher" and has been issued by the New York Board of Rabbis. This can be shown to the class and lead to interesting classroom activities.

*11. Many will find it easy to compare Jewish legends with the parables in the Old and New Testaments. This is not surprising, for the use of a tale to make a moral point goes far back in our civilization — to the Sanskrit *Panchatantra* and to the fables of Aesop. The well-informed teacher, on hearing these Jewish legends, may be reminded of such classics in English literature as Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* or Burton's *One Thousand and One Nights*. Other parallels will come to mind from other literatures.

*12. *Class discussion of the lecture entitled "Jewish Legends."* A class showing of the closed-circuit television or filmed lecture, or the classroom use of reprinted excerpts from Elie Wiesel's script, can be followed by such questions as:

a. How are these Jewish legends similar to the parables in the New Testament? How are they different?

b. What meaning does each legend have for us today?

c. In our daily lives, we are frequently required to give direct answers (sometimes merely "yes" or "no") to direct questions. How can the telling of a legend sometimes provide a much more meaningful answer?

d. Elie Wiesel is an accomplished literary artist who has thought deeply about some of man's most difficult problems. Have the legends he has told helped to clarify any of these problems? How?

e. Mr. Wiesel believes in the importance of maintaining a true Christian-Jewish dialogue. However, "in order to give meaning, continuity and relevancy to any dialogue, both sides must tell the truth, must hide nothing. Only then can the dialogue embody hope." What truths are embodied or revealed in these legends?

f. "Questions are not dangerous; answers are." What does Mr. Wiesel mean? Do you agree with him? Can you think of any examples from history (or from your own experience) that would bear out his statement?

g. In Mr. Wiesel's opinion, Jupiter is not a living person, whereas King David, Rabbi Akiba, Moses and Samuel *are*. In evaluating this statement, consider what distinctions can be drawn between legend and myth.

h. "Today we know how dangerous words are. Today we know that words can indeed create a universe, and perhaps one day will destroy it." What things are being said today that are dangerous and destructive? What can we do to make them less destructive?

i. What point is Mr. Wiesel making in the legend of the Baal Shem Tov, his prayer in the wood and the practices of his disciples?

j. Which of Mr. Wiesel's legends made the strongest impression upon you? Why?

*13. *Audio enrichment.* Student readings of Biblical stories can be supplemented by listening to worthwhile recordings. (*Refer to* Part VII of the Model Instructional Unit.)

**14. *Songs and dances.* Recordings of Jewish folksongs, Hasidic songs and dances, religious songs and Israeli folk music are available. Talented students can refer to the section of *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore* (*see* bibliography) entitled "Songs and Dances," and be called upon to present folk and religious songs and dances.

**15. *Creative writing.* The writing of original fables and legends (including contemporary myth-making and folk-storytelling) should be encouraged. The best examples can be anthologized in a class magazine (which might also include crossword puzzles, maps, drawings, pupil-made quizzes, etc.).

Bibliography for Teachers and Students

* — indicates books suggested for the average high school student
** — indicates books suggested for the superior high school student
All other books are recommended for teachers

*AUSUBEL, NATHAN (Editor). *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore.* New York: Crown Publishers, 1948.

This book contains a varied collection of stories, legends and folk songs, spanning approximately 3000 years of Jewish life.

**BAMBERGER, BERNARD J. *Fallen Angels.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1952.

Suitable for an interdisciplinary seminar in literature, philosophy, history and religion, this is a presentation of beliefs, myths, tales and superstitions concerning fallen angels (in Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

**BUBER, MARTIN. *Legends of Baal-Shem.* New York: Harper, 1955.

Twenty stories about the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, who lived in Eastern Europe from 1700 to 1760. This book, which was originally written in 1907, was revised in 1954.

*BUBER, MARTIN. *Tales of the Hasidim.* 2 vols. New York: Schocken, 1947.

For almost 150 years, Hasidic tales were orally transmitted from generation to generation. Buber who, after leaving Germany, was Professor of Social Philosophy at the Hebrew University at Jerusalem, collected this folk literature and gave it a folk presentation. (Also available in paperback.)

*BUBER, MARTIN. *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman.* New York: Horizon, 1956. (Also published in paperback by the Indiana University Press.)

Rabbi Nachman, grandson of Odel, who in turn was a daughter of the Baal Shem Tov, lived from 1772 to 1811. He travelled in Palestine where he studied the Cabalah, later returning to the Ukraine and his many followers. Buber has collected here some of the most interesting tales told by this famous Hasidic rabbi.

**CRONBACH, ABRAHAM. *Stories Made of Bible Stories.* New York: Bookman Associates, 1961.

This book is a collection of highly individualistic, freely altered versions of Biblical narratives.

**GARTENBERG, LEO. *Torah Thoughts.* New York: Jonathan David, 1967.

First begun as stories, anecdotes and interpretations in a column in an Anglo-Jewish newspaper, this is a 4-volume compilation of lesser known stories and legends revolving primarily about the Bible.

*GINZBERG, LOUIS. *Legends of the Jews.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956. (For the bibliographical listing of the seven-volume compendium from which this book is drawn, *see* Classroom Activities, 1.)

Variations on the stories in the Scriptures as told and retold in the ancient east in synagogues, churches and the somes of 100 generations of men.

GLATZER, NAHUM. *A Jewish Reader.* New York: Schocken, 1961.

This revised edition of Glatzer's *Time and Eternity* is an anthology of eighteen centuries of Jewish life and thought, formal theology and simple faith, philosophy and folklore, practical law and mystical contemplation. Each selection is fully documented.

**GLENN, M. G. *Jewish Tales and Legends.* New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1929.

Designed primarily for young Jewish students, this is a collection of tales and legends from the Talmud and Midrash, dealing with Pentateuchal figures and heroes.

*GOITEIN, S. D. *From the Land of Sheba.* New York: Schocken Books, 1947.

A collection of folk tales of the Jews of Yemen.

**GOLDIN, HYMAN E. *Bible and Talmud Stories.* New York: Star Hebrew Book Co., 1931.

A three-volume Biblical history, with stories from the Talmud and Midrash. It also contains questions, maps and illustrations.

**GOLDIN, HYMAN E. *The Book of Legends.* New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1929.

A three-volume compilation of legends and fables from the Midrash and Talmud, covering the Biblical period from the creation to the downfall of Haman (Vol. I, II), as well as the Talmudic period (Vol. III).

**ILIOWIZI, HENRY. *In the Pale.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1897.

Tales of fact, folklore and fiction about the Russian Jews.

*MECKLER, DAVID L. *Miracle Men.* New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1964.

A rich collection of Hasidic tales is to be found in this provocative volume.

MINTZ, JEROME. *Legends of the Hasidim: An Introduction to Hasidic Literature and Oral Tradition in the New World.* University of Chicago Press, 1968.

An interesting combination of folklore and cultural anthropology, this book interweaves tales and legends with data from interviews and life histories. Includes many excellent photographs.

MONTEFIORE, C. G. and LOEWE, H. *A Rabbinic Anthology.* Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1963.

This is a compendium and interpretation of all those passages in Talmudic and Midrashic literature which bear on the nature of God, the law, prayer, faith, sin, charity, Messianism and the Last Judgment.

*NEWMAN, LOUIS. *The Hasidic Anthology.* New York: Charles Scribner's, 1938. (Also published in paperback by Schocken.)

This work contains representative selections which give the reader some feeling of the basic character of Hasidic thought and actions. It also makes an excellent supplement to the works of Martin Buber.

**NOY, DOV. *Folktales of Israel.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

Seventy-one tales selected from the Israeli Folktale Archives, representing religious and secular tales dating back to Biblical times.

*POTOK, CHAIM. *The Chosen.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967. (Also published in paperback by Fawcett.)

This best seller tells the story of a son of a Hasidic rabbi from Brooklyn, his friendship with an Orthodox Jewish boy who does not belong to the Hasidic sect, and the tension set up between father and son when the latter chooses to study psychology.

*RABINOWICZ, HENRY M. *The Slave Who Saved the City.* New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1960.

A collection of Hasidic tales of the Baal Shem Tov. Adapted for young readers.

**RAPPOPORT, ANGELO S. *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel.* New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1966.

A three-volume compilation of Jewish myths and legends.

*RUNES, DAGOBERT D. *Lost Legends of Israel.* New York: The Philosophical Library, 1961.

A collection of tales from many areas of the world, including Ethiopia and Morocco.

*SCHWARZ, LEO W. *The Jewish Caravan.* 2nd Edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.

This book is a collection of Jewish writings, primarily fictional. Of especial interest is the section devoted to Hasidic fiction and non-fiction. (This appears in the chapter entitled "The World of Hasidism," pp. 373-93.)

*SILVERMAN, ALTHEA O. *The Harp of David.* Hartford: Hartmore House, 1964.

The younger reader, especially, will enjoy this collection of legends and tales associated with Mt. Zion and King David.

SPIEGEL, SHALOM. *The Last Trial.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967.

This is a brilliant study and exposition of the countless legends based on the Biblical story of the intended sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham.

**TRACHTENBERG, JOSHUA. *Jewish Magic and Superstition.* New York: World Publishing Co., 1961.

A study of a less "legitimate" phase of Jewish folklore.

**VILNAY, ZEV. *Legends of Palestine.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1932.

Legends derived from Hebrew and Arabic sources, covering a long period of Jewish history.

*WIESEL, ELIE. *Night.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1960.

The personal experiences of the author in German concentration camps.

*WIESEL, ELIE. *The Gates of the Forest.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

This book describes how a group of Jewish partisans carried on their opposition to the Nazis in the forests of Transylvania.

*WIESEL, ELIE. *The Town Beyond the Wall.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967.

A young man, who has survived the holocaust, returns to his home town to seek out the person who stood by and watched as countless Jews were herded off to their death.

*WIESEL, ELIE. *Legends of Our Time.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

A series of stories and essays which represent a powerful new kind of myth-making.

For the interested or advanced student, the following works (which are somewhat related to the general subject), offer a rich and varied sampling of Jewish stories and tales by some of its leading advocates:

1. HOWE, IRVING and GREENBERG, ELIEZER (Editors). *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories.* New York: Viking, 1954.
2. PERETZ, ISAAC LEIB. *In This World and The Next: Selected Writings.* New York: Yoseloff, 1958.
3. ALEICHEM, SHOLOM. *Selected Stories.* Introduction by Alfred Kazin. New York: Modern Library, 1956.
4. SINGER, ISAAC BASHEVIS. *The Spinoza of Market Street.* New York: Farrar, Strauss, 1961.

Model Instructional Unit

prepared by Milton Silver

In the preceding pages we have what might properly be referred to as a *resource unit* — that is to say, a reservoir of materials from which the individual teacher may draw in evolving a particular unit (or units) suited to his own as well as his class' needs and interests. Such units may be brief or long (depending on the time available); separate from or integrated into whatever material the teacher would normally be teaching.

On the other hand, the model instructional unit presented below consists of a more narrow range of objectives and learning activities, plus evaluatory techniques for the teacher and a listing of enrichment aids. It is specifically designed for the teacher with a four-week block of time at his disposal, and outlines in step-by-step fashion concrete lesson plans according to a cohesive, structured and meaningful pattern.

Title: JEWISH LEGENDS
Grade Level: TWELFTH YEAR ENGLISH (WORLD LITERATURE)
Time (or duration of unit): FOUR WEEKS

I. OBJECTIVES

A. Teacher's objectives

1. To evaluate the significance of Jewish legends in their own time and their validity today.
2. To determine the origins of certain specific legends and generalize concerning the origins of others.
3. To understand better the many facets of Jewish life and religion, in different periods and in different places.
4. To stimulate interest in, and appreciation of, legends in general and Jewish legends in particular.
5. To develop fuller awareness of a common cultural heritage in the Biblical stories.
6. To develop specific abilities and skills — in reading and comprehending prose, in research and reporting, in oral English and in creative expression (dramatics, music and art, writing).

B. Pupil's objectives

1. What is the difference between a myth and a legend? What is a folktale?
2. Why do we study legends? Why do we read and discuss *Jewish* legends?
3. Is there a special way of reading and interpreting myths and legends?
4. What is unique about Jewish legends? What do they have in common with other legends?
5. What can I learn about the Jew through a study of Jewish myths, legends and folktales?

II. OVERVIEW

The unit can best be dealt with through a study which is neither mere story-telling nor mechanical academics. A proper approach and thoughtful selection of material should provide the flavor, charm and illumination of legendry, without completely sacrificing informative scholarship.

III. APPROACHES

A. Motivations

1. Read a selected legend or folktale, one which is both brief and provocative. Have students consider how much they can deduce about the people who produced the tale.
2. Referring to Nathan Ausubel's *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore:*
   a. Have talented students prepare/present a song or dance.
   b. Present, for class solution (and evaluation) selected riddles and conundrums.
   c. Have the class compare a Christian parable and a Jewish parable.
3. Read, and have the class compare, an American legend and a Biblical legend.
4. The teacher can adapt a Biblical story (as does Abraham Cronbach, for example, in *Stories Made of Bible Stories*) and thus provoke class discussion and evaluation.

B. Assigned readings

1. Class texts — Louis Ginzburg's *Legends of the Jews* and Ausubel's *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore.*
2. Supplementary reading — *See* below IV, B, 3 for assignments for individual reports and panel discussions.

IV. WORKING PERIOD

A. First week — Introductory activities

1. Utilize as many of the motivations as seem appropriate to the realizations of the goals of the unit and the interests of the class.
2. The television or film lecture by Elie Wiesel can be viewed by the class, or reprinted excerpts read. This should be followed by appropriate discussion questions listed under "Classroom Activities and Discussion Topics," No. 11.
3. Consider examples of American folklore; then contrast its 300-year history in a unified geographic area with the folklore of the Jews over many centuries and in many parts of the world (though uniquely unified, nonetheless). The class should be directed in readings from *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore* with the intention of understanding Jewish culture and history, experiences and responses, objectives and values — as revealed in:
   a. Stories about wise men and judges
   b. Parables and riddle-solving
   c. Lore concerning pious men, charitable men and martyrs
   d. Legends about prayer, temptation, miracles, messiahs and skeptics
   e. Folk tales about strong men
   f. Jewish humor
   g. Religious lore

B. Second and third weeks — Developmental activities

1. Continue class readings in, and discussions of, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore,* especially religious tales and legends (biblical and folk).
2. Similarly, assign and analyze selections in *Legends of the Jews* (for class study).
3. Supplementary individual and group assignments might include:
   a. A report on the distinction between myth and legend; between legend and folktale.
   b. Research reports on the history and development of Jewish myth and legend.
   c. Reports on legends of the Golem and the Dybbuk; readings and dramatizations from Paddy Chayevsky's *The Tenth Man.*
   d. Reports on Hasidism; readings from Hasidic legends; class discussion of Chaim Potok's *The Chosen.*

e. Readings and panel discussions, emphasizing student-led class discussion. Suggestions include (*see* bibliography below):

(1) *The Book of Legends* — What insights do we gain concerning Judaism and the Jewish people?

(2) *Fallen Angels* — How (and why) is the Devil important in contemporary thinking and literature? Similarities and divergencies in major religions?

(3) *From the Land of Sheba* — How do these folktales reveal the many facets of the relatively unknown Yemenite Jews? How do they combine Judaism and Oriental culture?

(4) *The Harp of David* — How do these stories relate to the suffering of the Jews in Europe? To the achievements of the Jewish state of Israel?

(5) *In the Pale* — How do these tales reveal the suffering and hope, the wretchedness and dreams, the gloom and the faith of the Russian Jews?

(6) *Legends of Palestine* — How do these tales reflect the land?

(7) *Lost Legends of Israel* — How do these tales reflect/reveal the Jewish people? What common factor runs through them all?

(8) *Miracle Men* — Why are these tales considered "unmatched in the literature of the world in their unusual motifs, their wealth of imagination and spirituality and in their pure story interest"?

(9) *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel* — Since Jewish myths DO differ from myths of other people, what facets of life, ethical problems, understandings, etc. are revealed about these people?

4. Student-led discussions can be followed by student-made tests.

5. Reports and readings should be augmented by recordings of actors and actresses reading *The Book of Job, The Book of Judith* and *The Book of Ruth, Genesis, The Tale of David* (*see* recordings below).

6. Enrichment possibilities include a sampling of Yiddish literature *refer to* IV A, 2 and 3 in the model instructional unit to be found in the guide, entitled "The American Jewish Writer"). Recordings of works by Sholom Aleichem and I. B. Singer can be utilized.

7. Throughout, students should be encouraged to read aloud, to dramatize and to collect illustrative material.

C. Fourth week — Culminating activities

1. Quizzes and essays should be evaluated to determine what the students have learned about the Jewish people through their folklore. The best essays should be read aloud.
2. Students should write original fables and folk stories, legends about Christian heroes, interpretations of the Old and New Testaments, modern myths, etc. The best examples, together with drawings, diagrams, etc., can be published for class enjoyment and evaluation.
3. Written and oral reports should assess similarities and differences between Jewish and non-Jewish parables, the universal values of Jewish legends, the literary values and unique importance of the Bible.
4. Similarly, students should respond to such questions as: Which legend (or myth or folktale) did you like most? Why?

V. EVALUATION TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES

1. Teacher observation of student performance.
2. Teacher judgment of creative activity.
3. Student performances on reports and panel discussions.
4. Teacher-made tests.
5. Student-made tests.
6. Group self-evaluation.

VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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BAMBERGER, BERNARD. *Fallen Angels.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1952.

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Tales of Rabbi Nachman. Paperback — Midland Books.

CHAYEVSKY, PADDY. *The Tenth Man.* Paperback — Vintage.

CRONBACH, ABRAHAM. *Stories Made of Bible Stories.* New York: Bookman, 1961.

GINZBURG, LOUIS. *Legends of the Jews.* Paperback — Simon and Schuster.

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VILNAY, ZEV. *Legends of Palestine.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1932.

VII. INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS (ENRICHMENT MATERIALS AND RESOURCES)

A. Student-made illustrative materials: e.g., maps, murals, drawings, dioramas.

B. Closed-circuit television broadcast or film by Elie Wiesel, entitled "Jewish Legends," available from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

C. Recordings

1. *The Book of Job.* Caedmon TC1076.
2. *The Book of Judith and The Book of Ruth.* Caedmon TC1052.
3. *Genesis: The Creation and Noah.* Caedmon TC1096.
4. *Isaac Bashevis Singer Reading His Stories.* Caedmon TC1200.
5. *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.* Caedmon TC1242.
6. *Old Testament Psalms and The Tale of David.* Caedmon TC1053.
7. *Rip Van Winkle.* Caedmon TC1241.
8. *Tevya and His Daughters.* Col. OL-5225.
9. *The World of Sholom Aleichem.* Tikva 28.

D. Movie (rental) : *The Story of Ruth.* Color, 132 Min., 20th Century Fox.